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The Promise of the New Ecumenical Directory

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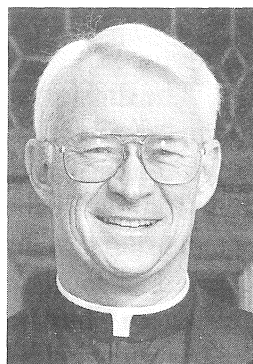
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The Promise of the New Ecumenical Directory

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The new Roman Catholic *Ecumenical Directory* (ED), officially titled the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, was released on June 8, 1993 by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.¹ In announcing it, Pope John Paul II said that its preparation was motivated by "the desire to hasten the journey towards unity, an indispensable condition for a truly renewed evangelization."² The pope's linking of Christian unity with a renewal of the Church's work of evangelization is important, for the very witness of the Church as a community of humankind reconciled in Christ is weakened by the obvious lack of unity among Christians.

The new *ED* is divided into a Preface and Five chapters: I. THE SEARCH FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY; II. THE ORGANIZATION IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH SERVING CHRISTIAN UNITY; III. ECUMENICAL FORMATION IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH; IV. COMMUNION OF LIFE AND SPIRITUAL ACTIVITY AMONG THE BAPTIZED; and V. ECUMENICAL COOPERATION, DIALOGUE AND COMMON WITNESS: PRINCIPLES. We will consider each section briefly.

PREFACE

The Preface lists the reasons for the revision, those to whom it is addressed, and its aims. A "Note" published by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity on May 10, 1993 spelled out somewhat more completely the issues that the revision had to deal with. First, it updates the previous *ED* (1967, 1970)³ in light of the revised Code of Canon Law for the Latin Church (1983) and the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (1990). Second, it completes the previous *ED* by dealing with topics such as ecumenical collaboration, cooperation in social and cultural life, and particularly, mixed marriages which were not covered in the earlier *ED*. Third, the new *ED* is introduced with a new chapter which reiterates the ecumenical commitment of the Catholic Church and states the theological basis for its ecumenical involvement.⁴

Though the *ED* is addressed "to the pastors of the Catholic Church," it concerns all the faithful who are called to work of Christian unity (no. 4). Its purpose is to give "orientations and norms for universal application to guide Catholic participation in ecumenical activity" (no. 6). In a recent commentary, Cardinal Edward Cassidy, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, observed that the Directory was the result of wide consultation within the Catholic Church "with a particular collaboration between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith" (CDF) and has been published "with a formula that gives it extraordinary authority."⁵

I. THE SEARCH FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

Chapter I reviews the Church's teaching on ecumenism, based on the documents of the Second Vatican Council, especially the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) and the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) (no. 10). The *ED* understands the Church within the context of an ecclesiology of communion:

Thus united in the threefold bond of faith, sacramental life and hierarchical ministry, the whole people of God come to be what the tradition of faith from the New Testament onward has always called *koinonia*/communion. This is a key concept which inspired the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council and to which recent teaching of the magisterium has given great importance" (no. 12).

In its deepest reality communion is the unity which Christians enjoy with the Father through Christ in the Spirit. The "communion which constitutes the church of God" (no. 13) is maintained and manifested in a special way by the communion between the bishops of the various churches; together the bishops make up a college which has a head, the bishop of Rome (no. 14). Thus the Church itself is a communion of churches. Does the *ED* maintain that the Church of Christ subsists *only* in the Catholic Church, as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has argued in its interpretation of the "*subsistit in*" clause of *Lumen Gentium* 8?⁶ *It does not*. Cardinal Cassidy has several times made clear that the Council did not intend to proclaim an exclusive identity between the Church of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church. In May, 1991 he said that the change that took place at the Council in *Lumen Gentium* 8 "does not say or imply that the Church founded by Christ continues to exist nowhere else than in that Church."⁷ In February of 1993 he observed that the 1992 CDF letter on *Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion* was limited in that it did not "go deeply into an ontological discussion of *koinonia* which would show all the aspects of the relationship between the church of Christ, the *una sancta*, and the Catholic Church in its universal and particular expressions."⁸

The 1992 CDF letter itself went beyond its earlier restrictive interpretation in recognizing the Orthodox churches as particular churches.⁹ Hopefully this means that the effort of the CDF to interpret LG 8 more narrowly has come to an end.

The new *ED*, in saying that Catholics believe that "the entirety of revealed truth, of sacraments and of ministry that Christ gave . . . is found within the Catholic communion of the church" governed by the successor of Peter and the bishops in communion with him (no. 17), reaffirms what the Second Vatican Council taught. It continues to use the technical expression "churches and ecclesial communities," to distinguish between those churches recognized as having valid orders and those not so recognized.¹⁰ But the *ED* seems to speak much more clearly than past documents of a real though not yet perfect communion which exists between the Catholic Church and other churches and ecclesial communities. It says that "other churches and ecclesial communities, though not in full communion with the Catholic Church, retain in reality a certain communion with it" (no. 18). Its language here and in other places is much more explicit than that of the Second

Vatican Council, which speaks of the partial communion between other baptized Christians and the Catholic Church, rather than between the Catholic Church and other churches and ecclesial communities *as such*.¹¹ The Pontifical Council's note on the *ED* speaks of this communion as "differentiated,"¹² or embracing a range of differing situations.

The unity of the Church is understood as being "realized in the midst of a rich diversity" which is a dimension of the Church's catholicity (no. 16.) "This unity which of its very nature requires full visible communion of all Christians, is the ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement" (no. 20). The new *ED* recognizes that ecumenical activity takes place in different ways and on many different levels. Its vision here is organic, envisioning the construction and manifestation of Christian unity as a creative task which must take place day by day on every level of the Church, on that of the universal Church, on national or regional levels, in the diocese, in parishes, and in the various groups and communities (no. 27). The faithful are encouraged to undertake their own ecumenical initiatives, with the recognition of the need for discernment and guidance by the church's pastors (no. 30). Ecumenical relations can only be based on the "imperfect though real communion" which already exists between those who recognize and respect each other; the sects and new religious movements present a separate question still being studied (no. 35).

II. THE ORGANIZATION IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH OF THE SERVICE OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

Chapter II catalogues and discusses the resources the Catholic Church has for its ecumenical activity, both personal and organizational. Though the bishops have the primary responsibility for guiding ecumenical work, each local church or diocese should have a "diocesan officer for ecumenical questions," a man or woman charged with coordinating the ecumenical activities of the diocese in collaboration with the bishop. Among the responsibilities of this ecumenical officer is that of representing the Catholic community in its relations with other churches and ecclesial communities and their leaders (no. 41).

The diocese should also have a council or commission for promoting ecumenical activity; it should reflect all the members of the diocese—clergy, religious, lay men and women, especially those with ecumeni-

cal expertise, as well as members of the other diocesan offices and commissions (no. 42). Parishes should have their own ecumenical programs and groups to carry them out (no. 45). It would be interesting to know how many parishes and congregations have local ecumenical committees.

The Roman Catholic Church has other, more formal bodies with ecumenical responsibilities. The various synods of the Eastern Catholic churches and each episcopal conference should have an ecumenical commission staffed by representative men and women. An important responsibility of these national or synodal ecumenical commissions is to put into practice the ecumenical norms and instructions of the Holy See, such as those of the new *ED*.

Among other organizations within the Catholic Church with ecumenical responsibilities are the religious orders and congregations, societies of apostolic life, and different organizations of the faithful, whether local, national, or international. Each of these should cultivate a sense of responsibility for the task of overcoming the divisions between Christians and bringing their different churches into communion.

The *ED* says something quite interesting about organizations of the faithful. It points out that such organizations which have objectives such as spiritual renewal, action for peace and social justice, education, economic aid to countries "should develop the ecumenical aspects of their activities" and see that it be given adequate expression "even, if necessary, in their statutes and structures" (no. 52). What does that suggest? Does it not suggest that we should not attempt to do everything alone, but rather, should link up and participate in networks in our social justice activities, our renewal programs, as much as we can, with those from other churches and ecclesial communities?

III. ECUMENICAL FORMATION IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The third chapter deals with Catholic ecumenical formation, of Catholic people themselves, both faithful and pastoral ministers, and through Catholic educational institutions. There are many opportunities in the life of the Church to give expression to the Church's ecumenical concern, in the study of the Scriptures, in preaching, catechesis, and liturgy. Preaching should call the faithful to a vision of reconciliation beyond tensions and differences. Catechesis should nourish the

desire for unity and prepare Catholics to live respectfully with other Christians. Liturgy offers an opportunity to pray for Christian unity. An appreciation of the diverse sources of the spiritual life in the different churches and ecclesial communities--the mystical tradition of the Christian East and the spiritual treasures of the monastic life, the worship and piety of Anglicans, evangelical prayer, and the different forms of Protestant spirituality--should bring Christians together for shared prayer and some form of public worship (no. 63).

A concern for ecumenism should find expression in Roman Catholic institutions. Parishes should have "someone charged with promoting and planning ecumenical activity" (no. 67). Schools of all kinds, including Catholic universities, should incorporate an ecumenical dimension to their programs of religious instruction and study, rooting out language which distorts the image of other Christians, while special efforts should be made to understand the origins and teachings of churches and ecclesial communities which are present in the region (no. 68).

Special consideration should be given to the formation of those engaged in pastoral work. The document emphasizes the importance of careful ecumenical preparation for those who are to be ordained. They should have a doctrinal formation which enables them to distinguish between the substance of the faith and the various ways in which divine truths are formulated. Though all their courses should have an ecumenical dimension, they should have a compulsory course in ecumenism and the various issues it raises at the beginning of their theological studies (no. 79). Their formation should also include the opportunities for practical experiences with Christians from other communities, opportunities for mutual encounter, dialogue, and perhaps faith sharing (no. 82). We speak today about "insertion experiences" for learning experientially about the lives of the poor. Perhaps an "ecumenical insertion" experience should be a part of the ministerial formation as well.

Those preparing for ordained ministry should be able to take courses taught by professors from other churches and ecclesial communities, though doctrinal courses for seminarians should be taught by Catholic professors (no. 192). The same norms apply for other pastoral ministers (no. 83), including religious who should have an ecumenical dimension to their formation from the novitiate on (no. 84). Ecumenical education for pastoral ministers ordained and unordained should be

a constant concern of church leaders. It would be interesting to know how many of those preparing for ministry in Catholic seminaries and theological centers would be able to identify the WCC text on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*.

IV. COMMUNION IN LIFE AND SPIRITUAL ACTIVITY AMONG THE BAPTIZED

Part IV of the new *ED* is certainly the most interesting section of the document and is frequently challenging. It deals with the practical applications of the Church's ecumenical commitment in regard to baptism, common prayer, the possibilities and limits of *communicatio in sacris* or sharing in sacramental life, updating the treatment of these topics in the earlier directory and adding an important new section on mixed marriages.

A. Sacrament of Baptism

Like Vatican II, the *ED* sees baptism as constituting the sacramental bond of unity which joins all baptized Christians in a real though not yet full communion. Since baptism is only done "in a given church or ecclesial community," it should not be conferred jointly by ministers belonging to different churches. Though baptism is celebrated only by one minister in the Catholic tradition, for pastoral reasons it may be sometimes appropriate for the minister of another tradition to assist by reading a lesson or offering a prayer (no. 97).

Godparents are understood not just as relatives or friends; they represent the community of faith. However when there is sufficient reason one godparent might come from another church or ecclesial community, and Catholics may be godparents for Christians of other traditions (no. 98). The norm then for Catholic baptisms is that at least one godparent must be a Catholic.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults provides a way of receiving into full communion with the Catholic Church those who desire it, but a distinction should be made between them and those not yet baptized since baptism conferred in other churches and ecclesial communities is recognized as valid unless there are serious reasons for questioning either the form or intention of a particular baptism. Should there be need for a conditional baptism, it should always be private, not public (no. 99). Those from the ecclesial communities of the 16th

century Reformation entering into full communion with the Catholic Church are to be confirmed since agreement has not yet been reached with those communities over the significance and sacramental nature of confirmation (no. 101).

B. Sharing Spiritual Activities and Resources

The principle for sharing in prayer and worship articulated by the new *ED* is based on the real but not yet full ecclesial communion which already exists among Christians of different traditions. Therefore any sharing of spiritual activities or resources needs to reflect both the real communion in the life of the Holy Spirit which exists among Christians as well as its yet incomplete character (no. 104).

The lack of full communion in faith, worship, and community precludes eucharistic concelebration with members of other churches and ecclesial communities (no. 106). But, with the recognition that Christians should always respect each others' liturgical and sacramental disciplines (no. 107), prayer with other Christians is encouraged (no. 108). The restoration of Christian unity should be a particular concern of shared prayer (no. 110), and when appropriate, those taking part in a shared service may use the dress appropriate to their ecclesiastical position and role (no. 113). Ecumenical services should not take the place of Sunday worship (no. 115). Prayer from other liturgical traditions, such as morning or evening prayer, is a rich resource (no. 117). Prayers for other Christians living and dead and their leaders are appropriate, though not in the eucharistic prayer (no. 121).

Sharing in sacramental worship presents a much more difficult question. In this regard, the position of the new *ED* does not represent a change from that of the old, with a possible exception in the case of mixed marriages, to be covered below. First, with regard to the Eastern churches, eucharistic sharing is possible, though Catholics are cautioned that these churches often have more restrictive disciplines which should be respected (no. 122). For reasons of necessity or genuine spiritual advantage, Catholics may approach a minister of an Eastern church for the sacraments of Eucharist, penance, and the anointing of the sick (no. 123) and Catholic ministers may give these sacraments to members of an Eastern church who request them and are properly disposed, avoiding any suggestion of proselytism (no. 125). Because the Catholic Church ordinarily permits access to these sacraments only to those who share its oneness in faith, worship, and ecclesial life (no.

129), the rules for admitting those from other churches and ecclesial communities are much more restrictive.

A Catholic minister may administer these sacraments to a non-Catholic other than Eastern Orthodox when there is danger of death or some other grave and pressing need, under the following conditions: that the person is unable to have recourse for the sacrament to a minister of his or her own church or ecclesial community, that he or she asks for the sacrament, and manifests a Catholic faith and proper disposition in regard to it (no. 131). A Catholic who finds him or herself in a similar situation may request the sacraments only from a minister "in whose church these sacraments are valid or from one who is known to be validly ordained according to the Catholic teaching on ordination (no. 132).

At eucharistic celebrations in the Catholic Church, the scripture lessons should generally be read by Catholics, and the homily is reserved to the Catholic priest or deacon (no. 133).

The new *ED* includes an important recognition of the principle of ecumenical hospitality. Though Catholic churches are generally reserved for Catholic worship, the diocesan bishop may allow representatives of communities not in full communion with the Catholic church to use Catholic buildings and liturgical objects they need to celebrate their services when they do not have what is necessary for a worthy celebration (no. 137). Similarly, Catholic schools and institutions should make it possible for clergy of other churches or ecclesial communities to provide spiritual and sacramental ministry, including (with the permission of the diocesan bishop) the use of the church or chapel, to those of their own communities who are present in these Catholic institutions (no. 141).

C. Mixed Marriages

The section on mixed marriages is new to the *ED*, and it is an important one. Though it does not address all the concerns of those in mixed marriages, it has taken some steps to make it easier for these couples. A mixed marriage is defined as "any marriage between a Catholic and a baptized Christian who is not in full communion with the Catholic Church" (no. 143). The document acknowledges the growing number of mixed marriages throughout the world and looks on them positively, citing Pope John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio* to the effect that they "contain numerous elements that could well be made good use of

and developed both for their intrinsic value and for the contribution they can make to the ecumenical movement" (no. 145).

The *ED* emphasizes the need to respect the conscience of each partner (no. 146). While the Catholic party is expected "to promise sincerely to do all in his/her power to see that the children of the marriage be baptized and educated in the Catholic Church," it recognizes that the non-Catholic partner may feel a similar obligation and should not be required to make a formal promise, either orally or in writing (no. 150). And it notes that if in spite of the Catholic party's best efforts, the children are not baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church, the Catholic party does not fall under any censure of canon law (no. 151).

While canonical form is in most cases required for validity, there are exceptions. A marriage celebrated before an Orthodox minister is valid; the dispensation from canonical form in this case is required only for the lawfulness or "licity" of the service (no. 153). The *ED* does not permit a couple to have two separate religious services with the exchange of consent, though Catholics may for good reason receive a dispensation from canonical form (no. 156). In mixed marriages, one minister presides and receives the vows while the minister of the other party--if invited to do so--may assist by offering a prayer, reading from the Scripture, giving a brief exhortation, or blessing the couple (nos. 157-158).

The difficult question of intercommunion at mixed marriages receives a nuanced treatment. First of all, the *ED* states that because of the problems that arise, a mixed marriage ordinarily is celebrated outside the Eucharist. This may be news to many Catholics. But the *ED* also acknowledges that the bishop may permit the celebration of the Eucharist, and that the decision as to whether the non-Catholic party may be admitted to eucharistic communion in this situation "is to be made in keeping with the general norms existing in the matter both for Eastern Christians and for other Christians, taking into account the particular situation of the reception of the sacrament of Christian marriage by two baptized Christians" (no. 159).

This singling out "the particular situation" of two baptized Christians in a mixed marriage represents a breakthrough.¹³ The *ED* recognizes that a mixed marriage is already an example of sacramental sharing, as "the spouses in a mixed marriage share the sacraments of baptism and marriage" (no. 160). Thus this sharing might occasionally extend

to allowing bride and groom to share the Eucharist at their weddings (no. 159) and on other occasions (no. 160).¹⁴ Such eucharistic sharing "can only be exceptional and in each case the norms . . . concerning the admission of a non-Catholic Christian to eucharistic communion, as well as those concerning the participation of a Catholic in eucharistic communion in another church, must be observed" (no. 160).¹⁵

V. ECUMENICAL COOPERATION, DIALOGUE AND COMMON WITNESS

The final chapter in the *ED* is new. Its concern is to recommend ways for ecumenical cooperation in the Church's evangelical mission. The document acknowledges the importance of councils of churches and Christian councils and welcomes the increasing involvement of the Catholic Church in these bodies (nos. 166-171). It notes that membership in these bodies is a distinct question from that of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches (no. 170). Dialogue remains at the heart of ecumenism (no. 172). Christians from different traditions can work together in preparing biblical translations (no. 183) and the different churches and ecclesial communities are encouraged to draw up common liturgical texts which will enable them to pray together more easily (no. 187).

In situations of religious pluralism, cooperation in the field of catechesis can be mutually enriching (no. 188) and there should be ecumenical cooperation in institutions of higher learning. In the dialogue with other religions there are many opportunities for Christians to work together in the effort to address the social, cultural, and ethical questions facing society today (nos. 210-211), and in ministering to human need or working on behalf of the environment, health care, or social communications (nos. 215-218).

It is time to make a brief assessment of the document.

ASSESSMENT

1. Pope John Paul II's linking ecumenism with the Church's work of evangelization in his introduction of the *ED* is extremely important. Ecumenism cannot be dismissed as the concern of a few narrow specialists; it belongs to the task of proclaiming

the Gospel in today's world, and to the quality of the Church's witness.

2. The *ED* recognizes a differentiated communion existing between the Catholic Church and the other churches and ecclesial communities that is real if not yet full. One implication of this ecclesiology of communion is that it will no longer be possible for the Catholic Church to speak or act as though the Church of Christ exists only in the Catholic Church.
3. The *ED* makes a strong case for an ecumenical formation of pastoral ministers. It recommends a mandatory course on ecumenism at the beginning of theology for Catholic seminarians (no. 79) and suggests that some kind of practical experience with Christians from other churches and ecclesial communities should be a normal part of theological formation (no. 82).
4. A question frequently raised today is that of the possibility of a joint celebration of baptism. Because baptism is only done in a given church or ecclesial community, the *ED* states that it "may not be conferred jointly by two ministers belonging to different churches or ecclesial communities" (No. 97).
5. There is a significant recognition of the importance of ecumenical hospitality in the *ED*. With the permission of the bishop, Catholic churches and the chapels in Catholic schools and institutions may be made available to other churches and ecclesial communities to meet the needs of their own members present there (nos. 137, 141).
6. The new section on mixed marriages is an important step in the direction of recognizing the special needs of those in inter-church families. Mixed marriages are assessed positively and recognized as an ecumenical resource (no. 145). The *ED* affirms the importance of respecting the conscience of both partners, and the non-Catholic partner is not required to make a formal promise to raise the children in the Catholic Church. There is a clear statement that generally mixed marriages should be celebrated outside of the Eucharist.

Though the *ED* does not make any substantial changes on the difficult question of intercommunion, it provides that in

- certain exceptional cases not limited to Eastern Christians a couple entering into a mixed marriage might celebrate their wedding in the context of a Eucharist, and that the non-Catholic spouse might share in the Eucharist on this and other exceptional occasions (nos. 159-160).
7. The *ED* encourages a broad ecumenical cooperation in evangelization, catechesis, biblical scholarship, higher education, preparing common liturgical texts, and participation by Catholic churches in local and regional councils of churches. As the *ED* reaches its conclusion, it articulates a vision of ecumenical cooperation in all areas of important human endeavor.
8. The new *ED* itself becomes part of the process of ecumenical reception that it describes in no. 182.

Notes

- 1 Origins 23 (July 29, 1993).
- 2 Cited in *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition (27 January 1993).
- 3 "A directory for the application of the Second Vatican Council's decisions on ecumenism," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59 (1967) 574-592 and "Ecumenism in higher education," *AAS* 62 (1970) 705-724. Both documents are available in *Doing the Truth in Charity*, ed. Thomas F. Stransky and John B. Sheerin (New York: Paulist Press, 1982) pp. 41-57; 59-74.
- 4 Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, "Note on the Directory for the application of principles and norms on Ecumenism" (May 10, 1993) p. 4.
- 5 Edward Cardinal Cassidy, "The Revised Ecumenical Directory of the Catholic Church: A Valuable Instrument for Continued Ecumenical Commitment and Cooperation," *Centro Pro Unione* 44 (Fall 1993) p. 32.
- 6 See for example the CDF's Notification on Leonardo Boff's *Church, Charism and Power*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 77 (1985) pp. 758-759; Francis Sullivan critiques the argument of the CDF in his *The Church We Believe In* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988) pp. 29-33. See also Luis M. Bermejo, *Infallibility on Trial: Church, Conciliarity and Communion*, Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1992) pp. 45-58.

- 7 Edward Cardinal Cassidy, "The Catholic Church and Ecumenism as We Approach the Third Christian Millennium," *Ecumenical Trends* 20 (1991) p. 122.
- 8 Edward Cardinal Cassidy, "The Measure of Catholic Ecumenical Commitment," *Origins* 22 (1993) p. 739; the *ED* refers to the CDF letter on the Church understood as Communion in footnote 17 but does not quote it.
- 9 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion" (no. 17), in *Origins* 22 (1992) p. 111.
- 10 See Jerome Hamer, "La terminologie ecclésiologique de Vatican II et les ministères protestants," *Documentation Catholique* 68 (1971) pp. 626-628.
- 11 Cf. LG 15; UR 3.
- 12 Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, "Note," p. 7.
- 13 John Coventry observes: "Surely this last clause can only be taken as positive encouragement" in "The Ecumenical Directory," *One in Christ* 29 (1993) p. 358.
- 14 Cardinal Cassidy notes that this chapter "concludes with two numbers on eucharistic sharing in mixed marriages, at the time of the celebration and later on," in "The Revised Ecumenical Directory," p. 30.
- 15 Coventry points out that the *ED* does not make any consideration of children in an interchurch marriage; "The Ecumenical Directory," p. 358.